

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

302

April 10, 2020

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Admiral Karl Schultz
Commandant
United States Coast Guard
2703 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE
Washington, D.C. 20593

Dear Chairman Pai and Admiral Schultz:

We are writing to request an extension to the deadline for complying with the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) requirements for commercial fishing vessels that operate in the Alaska region. As you know, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and U.S. Coast Guard determined a few years ago that fishing vessels over 300GT operating in the Alaska region must comply with GMDSS requirements for Sea Area 3 or Sea Area 4. Vessels operating under an exemption or waiver have been given until January 31, 2021 to comply with these GMDSS equipment carriage requirements.

Given the strong safety record of the fishing fleet that has operated in the Alaska region over the last 20 years without meeting the GMDSS requirements for Sea Area 3 or Sea Area 4, Congress is working towards granting a permanent GMDSS exemption for these vessels. This is being accomplished through a section in the Coast Guard Authorization Act that exempts fishing vessels that primarily operate in the Alaska region, including fishing vessels that transit from states in the Pacific Northwest to conduct fishing operations in the Alaska region, from the requirements relating to carriage of VHF-DSC and MF-DSC equipment under subpart W of part 80 of title 47, Code of Federal Regulations.

The overseeing committees of the Senate and House of Representatives are currently working on reconciling the differences between the two versions of the Coast Guard bill to facilitate its passage in both chambers of Congress. However, Congress is heavily focusing on emergency measures to respond to the ongoing coronavirus outbreak, which has resulted in a delay in the progress on the Coast Guard bill. Consequently, the timeline for passage of the Coast Guard bill is unclear.

In light of this pending legislation, many vessel operators are withholding from installing new equipment that would be required to meet the GMDSS requirements for Sea Area 3 or Sea Area 4 until there is clarity on whether commercial fishing vessels will have to comply with the requirements. Installation of this equipment can cost upwards of \$100,000. Therefore, it is important for vessel operators to have certainty that this equipment will actually be required before making this type of investment.

This is why we are asking you to delay the deadline for compliance by no less than one year. Achieving compliance with the GMDSS requirements for Sea Area 3 or Sea Area 4 would require many vessels to arrange time in a shipyard to install the additional equipment. If for some reason the Coast Guard bill with the exemption is not passed soon, then vessel operators will have a very limited, if any, opportunity to get into a shipyard for this work prior to the current deadline. Shipyard work for the Alaska region fishing fleet is typically scheduled well in advance to ensure space availability at the shipyard and to ensure operators can build out their fishing plans around this work. The combination of uncertainty over whether or not this equipment will ever be required, and the disruption to fishing and shipyard work caused by the coronavirus pandemic further compound the challenges to meeting these equipment requirements by January 31, 2021. An extension of no less than one year will provide sufficient time for the work to be completed should it be determined that it will not be exempted.

While we aim to ultimately provide relief through the legislative process, we are grateful for any assistance that you can provide to our fishing fleet by communicating a decision to delay the implementation deadline for GMDSS requirements. This delay will provide a certainty that is greatly needed, more now than ever, as the entire fishing industry is heavily impacted by the health and economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Thank you for your prompt attention this matter.

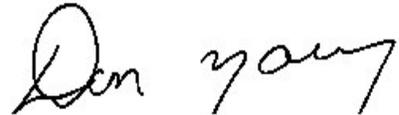
Sincerely,



LISA MURKOWSKI
U.S. Senator



DAN SULLIVAN
U.S. Senator



DON YOUNG
Congressman for All Alaska